Sights & Sounds of Multimedia

George Harding

Digital Picture Frame

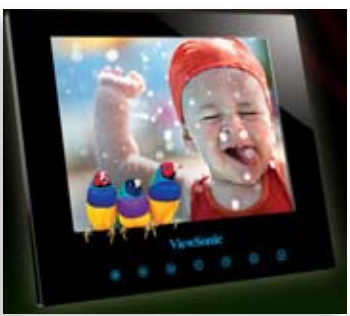
One of the most recent technologies for the consumer is the group of digital picture frames. They vary from a one-inch square device for attachment to a bracelet, to 8" by 10" units that are beautiful pieces of furniture.

ViewSonic has a wide range of picture frames. I received an 8" unit for review as a result of visiting their display room at the Consumer Electronics Show. While the diagonal screen measurement is 8", the frame is about 8½" X 8". The screen is surrounded by a lustrous black area. The bottom portion of this black area includes a series of control buttons. The screen resolution is 800 X 600, which provides excellent picture quality.

Digital picture frames have the ability to store a number of digital pictures and to display these pictures in a slide show. The unit I received can hold a large number of pictures with its 512 MB of flash memory. I loaded about 60 pictures and the storage is nowhere full. It came with several pictures and a movie preview.

The control buttons at the bottom of the screen are normally not visible, disappearing a few seconds after the last use. When you touch the control button area again, the buttons appear.

These buttons allow you to select a slide show, a movie, or change the default set-up. You may select the number of seconds each picture is shown, the type of transitions used between one picture and the next and more.



The most common display mode is a slide show, using all the pictures you have stored. A variant of this is to have a calendar and time display with a small version of the slide show beside the calendar. Having the clock available also allows an alarm function, should you need it.

You load pictures from your computer (JPG or BMP), or from several types of flash memory cards. To do so from your computer, you use the included cable to connect the device to a USB port. The device shows up as another storage device on your computer. You then simply drag and drop pictures onto the device.

Another way to display pictures is to use any of the five types of flash memory cards (SD, MMC, MS, XD and CF). Once a card is inserted, the pictures will be shown automatically in a few seconds.

In addition to pictures, you can add music and movie files. If music is available on the device, you can use it to accompany your slide show. It can be easily oriented in portrait or landscape mode, by rotating a stand on the back of the device. The device requires a wall outlet for power; there is no battery option.

This is really nice piece of equipment that I enjoyed testing. The price of these units has dropped quite a bit, but is still not an "impulse' buy!

About: Digital Photo Frame

Manufacturer: ViewSonic
www.viewsonic.com

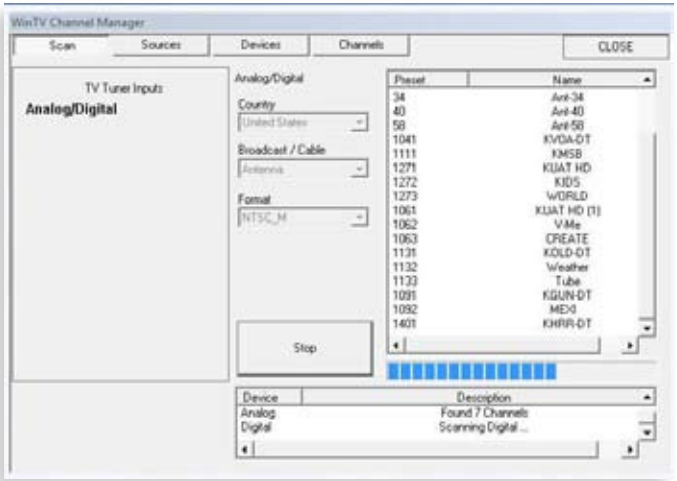
Price: Price varies by size and features. Unit tested is about $130 ($80 at Costco for limited time)

WIN TV

We are accustomed to watching TV on a TV set, but today's technology allows us to watch TV on a PC if we wish.

There are a couple of advantages to watching TV on a PC. One is the better resolution of the picture. An analog TV has very low resolution, compared to a computer monitor. A HDTV has a resolution similar to a PC monitor or even better. So, TV on a PC will look as good as it does on a HDTV.

The other is the size of the picture, or rather the shape. An analog TV has a picture that has a 4:3 type dimension, that is, it's only somewhat wider that it is tall. Your PC, on the other hand is more like the HDTV at 16:9,



almost twice as wide as it is tall. The effect of this is that you see more width in the picture.

Hauppauge sent me their WinTV-HVR-950Q to test. There's not really a whole lot to the device, surprisingly. The basic part of the device is a small oblong unit that translates a signal into the pixels that form the picture on your monitor. It's slightly larger than a flash drive and has a USB connector on one end, a video cable connector on the other.

The USB connector attaches to a USB on your PC by a cable that's supplied. The video cable attaches to either a small antenna or to the cable from your cable service.

The device comes with a CD-ROM that contains, among other things, the drivers for the device. Once the device is connected to your computer and the driver is installed, you must next do a scan for available channels. The channels found depend on whether you are scanning over-the-air or through your cable connection.

The scan takes some time to complete and finds both analog and digital channels. In my case, the scan found 12 analog channels and 12 digital channels. The channel numbers may not be those with which we're familiar, but they can be understood.

In the case of analog channels, the number is something like what you usually see on a non-cable system. For the digital channels, the number is multiplied by 10 and is increased by 1000, so that channel 4 would show as 1040.

One interesting aspect of the DTV switchover is that some stations have multiple broadcasts. For example, channel 9 has 9.1, 9.2 and 9.3, with different programs on each.

I had success the first time I ran the scan and the digital channels were beautiful! It was just like having an HDTV set on my lap. The analog channels were a disappointment in that most were faint and snowy. Some of you will remember the old days of rabbit ears, when a station was only clear when the rabbit ears were precisely rotated.

The third night I ran WIN TV, nothing was displayed on my screen for digital channels. I reran the scan and came up with no digital channels and the same analog channels as before.

I uninstalled the application, restarted and reinstalled, reran the scan, got only analog channels. Support was the next stop for help on what action to take. After two contacts, I received a new driver set for the unit. I downloaded it and reinstalled the software.

This produced success! After doing the scan one more time, I got the same analog and digital channels as the first time. I have tried out the software several times and it has worked each time. I was able to watch two NCAA games simultaneously, one on TV and one on the Hauppauge unit.

The software not only shows you the channels found by the scan, it also gives you the ability to take snapshots of whatever you are watching and in addition, you can set up the unit to record a program at a set time. There is companion software that is somewhat like a *TV Guide*.

Using the Hauppauge unit is like having a HDTV without having one. I enjoyed using it.

About: *WIN TV*

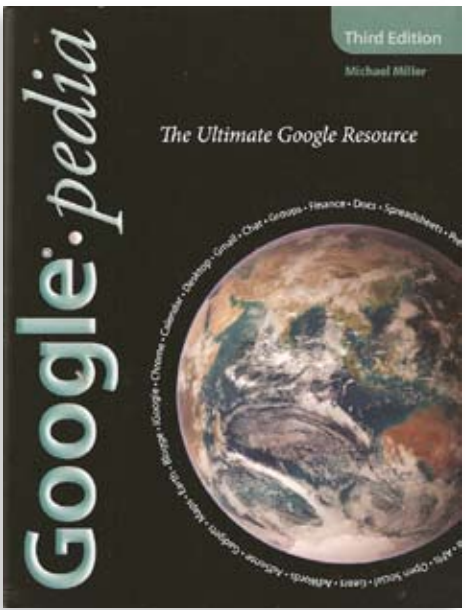
Vendor: Hauppauge
www.hauppauge.com

Price: $99 Direct

Googlepedia

This book is the greatest! If you are interested in anything Google, this is the place to go to find out about it.

This is a Que book, the 3rd edition, by Michael Miller, who is a prolific author for Que. He's written some 80 non-fiction how-to books, mostly about computer-related subjects.



The book has over 700 pages, including a comprehensive index, a very complete Table of Contents, 46 chapters and 3 appendices.

I suspect that a 4th edition is not far off, because Google is constantly developing new tools that you will want to know about.

The best known Google tool is the Web Search engine. In the olden days, say five years ago, there were several search engines, all of which produced a list of results that contained many duplicates and may not even have produced something useful to you.

Google took a new approach to produce search results that do not have duplicates, are up-to-date and are sequenced by probable usefulness to you. They do this by the following process:

Periodically, usually every few weeks, their GoogleBot crawler searches the web for each page, tracks every link in the page and saves a copy of each page it encounters on its servers.

Google creates an index to each of the saved pages, storing every important word on each page.

Once a search of the pages is complete, the results are ranked by methods known only by Google.

The rankings are displayed on the search results page in order by what is likely to be the most important to you, to the least likely.

There are many techniques to making a successful search, and these are described fully in the book. Using quotes or operators can significantly improve the accuracy of your search.

What's most interesting, though, is all the other services provided by Google. I suspect you, like me, are not aware of many of these:

GOOG-411. Search for businesses by voice from your cell phone. Dial 1-800-GOOG-411 to try it out.

Google Desktop. Create a home page environment that has just what you want on it.

Google Docs. Word processing, spreadsheet and presentation documents on the web, sharable with others.

Google Earth, Sky and Mars. Tools to explore these areas.

Google Gmail. An email portal.

Google Groups. Create and join specific discussion groups.

Google Maps. View maps and driving directions.

Google Notebook. Store web information you come across.

Google Reader. Display articles and headlines from blogs and RSS feeds.

Google Scholar. Read and search scholarly journals and articles.

Google Transit. Plan your trip using public transportation.

Google News and Web Alerts. Be advised of new material that meets your criteria.

And more…

Each chapter tells you about a Google service and how to use it. Each description is described simply to begin with, but continues with more details about how to make use of special features. You can easily be an expert user of any of their tools through this book.

All of these services came out of the Google Labs, which is essentially an R & D facility. It is constantly on the search for new, useful tools for users. One recently announced service is Google Voice that gives you free phone calls within the US, but also forwards calls to your cell phone and land line and transcribes voice messages into email.

I found this book fascinating, because it opened my eyes to all the things that are available from Google. It will take me some time to learn about the ones in which I'm interested.

About: *Googlepedia*

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